

## **The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women**

Amherst Public Hearing

April 25, 2007, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

Campus Center, Room 803, UMass Amherst, Amherst

### **Hearing Minutes**

**Attendees:** Pam Bockol, Shannon Demas, Melanie DeSilva, Peggy Fallon, Loren Fields, Bernie James, Jamie Jee, Amy Rayla, Holly Richardson, Patrick Rose, Anne Whittingham, Richard Wilkeson, Marianne Winters, Nikki Woodward

**Commisisoners:** Gloria Coney, Helen Corbett, Donna Finneran, Liz Houlihan

**Staff:** Jill Ashton, Linda Brantley

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Houlihan opened the meeting by welcoming the attendees and introducing the present members of the Commission.

### **Testimony**

Chair Houlihan, opening the floor for testimony, noted that the Commission would receive input and report it to state legislators and the MCSW's appointing authorities.

**Jamie Jee**, enrolled in the Masters program at the school of public health, touched upon equality in general, as well as the translation of feminist and humanist theory into social and political practice.

**Richard Wilkerson** discussed the impact of inequality, reinforcing the importance of its dissolution, addressing that even those who fear it would benefit. Specifically, Wilkerson cited the issues of increased stress on math and science at an earlier age for girls.

**Pam Bokol** presented written testimony in opposition to the state of the Commonwealth's prison system and policies. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

**Melanie DiSilva** of MotherWomen, Inc. spoke on the pioneer valley, discussing issues such as postpartum depression, feminism as a socio economic issue, motherhood and suicidal tendencies as well as the sentiment of stigmatization. Her full testimony is included in the appendix.

**Bernie Jones** discussed the importance of informing young women of opportunities to become more involved in advocating for women. She spoke about the issue of class and race based in that who can opt out is financially restrictive.

Breaking from the formal testimony, the attendees discussed the governor's recent decision to reject \$700,000 dollars of federal money for abstinence-only education. Mr. Jee responded that he believed it was a wise public policy decision. He also spoke

against the misconception that increased sex education leads to an increase in risk behavior, in truth more education has provided youth the ability to make health decisions. Ms. Jones applauded the governor for rejecting funds which she felt are anti-queer, anti-contraception, and anti-women.

Commissioner Coney asked the attendees if they felt that the campaign promises that the newly elected Governor made will be able to be kept in a tight budget year. An unidentified attendee said that she recognized the economic realities that the Commonwealth is facing, but decisions like the recent rejections of the abstinence-only federal funds, imbues in her a sense of trust that Massachusetts citizen's will be well served.

**Shannon Demas** asked to speak on behalf of student parents. She noted that on campus they are often overlooked and their needs go unaddressed. Ms. Demas argued that state colleges and universities should recognize the special needs of these students and be more committed to offering a quality education regardless of family or financial status. Commissioner Coney responded that similar concerns have been voiced by UMass Boston students.

**Marrienne Winters** first thanked the commission for conducting the public hearing. Her full testimony is included in the appendix.

**Holly Richardson** shifted gears by addressing the issues of prostitution for money and drugs, discussing the need for a needle exchange program. Additionally she expressed disappointment in the lack of sufficient ward representation and the need to decriminalize prostitution. Also, she supported the increased allocation of public funds to institutionalizing public community support and policies involved in this institution. Next she addressed the general sentiment that neither the police nor the DSS are truly helpful. That rather than focus on assistance, these institutions primarily concern themselves with maintaining order and that, therefore, such large policies should not receive the funding that they do. Ms. Richardson then criticized the failure of the public hearing to achieve the attendance of those voices that really need to be heard, those of the women that are in need. Ms. Richardson continued to list issues of discrimination both regarding gender and race noting Kateri Walsh as the sole female city councilor but also that Salem has just voted in its first female mayor.

### **Adjourn**

Commissioner Houlihan thanked the attendees for their contributions. The hearing was adjourned at 6:42.

### **Appendix**

Written Testimony

### **Pam Bockol**

I submit this testimony on Wednesday April 25, 2007 to enter into public dialogue my concerns regarding the rapid growth of the number of women being incarcerated.

Women of color represent the most rapidly growing group of people to be incarcerated, nearly double the rate for men. Currently, the total female incarcerated population in jails and prisons is more than 200,000. This rise is not because we have more female criminals in this society, we just have more and more laws that criminalize our behaviors. Unjust laws such as “mandatory minimums” meant to fight the war on drugs, which is really just a war on poor people and people of color. Unjust laws that criminalize women for trying to make a living – poor women who when lacking other means of survival exchange sex for money.

We are sadly mistaken if we believe that we can lock our social and economic problems away. We are sadly mistaken if we buy into politicians and the state’s ‘fear mongering’ tactics and ‘tough on crime’ rhetoric.

Locking people in cages comes with a great cost. Starting with the \$35.4 million being spent to build a women’s jail in Chicopee and the \$43,000 spent per woman per year to be caged in that jail. Our families and communities are also getting torn apart, as children of incarcerated women often get warehoused in foster homes and institutions. Many of our children will get thrust into the cycle of poverty and crime as they struggle to find their way through these unjust systems. There is also a great cost to our humanity, the cost inflicted from the mixed messages from this country that touts its so-called democracy, its so-called land of opportunity and justice for all. Together, let’s commit to justice for all.

The argument for women’s prisons and jails is that we as women need a place of our own. That housed behind bars of our own we will be free from harassment as well as have exclusive access to healthcare, education and drug treatment; services that are simply basic human rights and should be granted to all people, everyday, everywhere. It also doesn’t matter if women are only incarcerated with other women, if all the guards are also women – we are still locked in a cage. And these conditions breed dehumanization and othering, feeding the punishment mentality. The “we are here to teach those ‘criminals’ a lesson, that ‘they’ need our help, and ‘they’ need to be guided.” As enforcers of this harmful mentality correction officers also get denied the opportunity for positive employment.

What is true is that we as women do have needs, none of which include a cage. We need homes, access to affordable housing, meaningful work that pays a living wage, our loved ones close by, healthcare, and education. As members of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, I urge you to carry this message back to the Governor and the State House. All prison/jail construction needs to come to an immediate halt. These monies need to be reinvested in communities that have been most targeted and impacted by the criminal injustice system. Begin by supporting House Bill 1723, An Act Relative to Incarceration and its Impact on Public Safety, which calls for a 5 year moratorium on prison and jail construction and expansion in our state. It also calls for diverting funds into other areas to build healthy communities including access to healthcare and drug treatment on demand; affordable housing; quality public education and living-wage jobs.

I want to end by remembering the 16 people with families and loved ones who were killed at the hands of the Department of Corrections. They are Kelly Jo Griffen, Ronald Binnette, Daniel McMullen, Nelson Rodriguez, Jason Smith, John Yovino, Glen Bourgeois, Nicole Davis, Anthony Garafolo, Michael Keohane, Steven Koumaris, Eduardo Soto, Johnny Walker, Jarren Aranda, Russ Dagenais and just last Monday Francelina Soares Furtado.

There was a time before prisons; we need to work towards that time again. We cannot incarcerate our way out of problems that are rooted in racism and poverty. We need to work for justice. No new jails. No new prisons.

### **Melanie DeSilva**

Contact Information

[Melanie@motherwoman.org](mailto:Melanie@motherwoman.org)

Motherwoman.org

79 S. Pleasant Street

P.O. Box 2635

Amherst, MA 01004

(413) – 253 – 8990

My name is Melanie DeSilva. I'm the Executive Director of MotherWoman, a local mother's advocacy organization. Our mission is to provide programs that support and empower mothers to create personal and social change for themselves, their families, their communities and the world. We have many programs and priorities, but today I want to talk briefly about one of our focuses- postpartum depression and anxiety.

Postpartum depression and anxiety is a major public health issue, a feminist issue, and a rarely talked about economic and social justice issue. 10-25% of mothers experience postpartum depression and anxiety. For many of these mothers, the depression and anxiety becomes chronic. Symptoms of postpartum depression include being suicidal. The risk of suicide increases 70 fold in the year after an American mother gives birth. Those at highest risk of postpartum depression and anxiety are women of color, low income mothers, and teenage mothers. Mother's depression is a feminist issue because maternal depression is culturally stigmatized. Good mothers in our culture are not supposed to be depressed. This stigmatization keeps mothers with depression fearful and isolated, creating an obstacle to personal and economic empowerment, and collective organizing and action. Mother's depression is a social and economic justice issue because mothers who are depressed often lack the capacity needed to seek out essential services for themselves and their families, including employment, food, fuel and housing assistance, childcare, and treatment for depression. Imagine how hard it is to navigate the social service system as a poor mother. Now, add depression on top of that. Imagine a mother in an abusive relationship trying to escape. Now add depression to that.

Mothers' depression is a major public health crisis. Depression increases the risk of child abuse and neglect, and studies show that mother's depression has a

negative impact of children's cognitive and physical development. Motherwoman is trying to do something about this problem. We are the organizational leaders in the area of maternal depression. We are developing a Postpartum Depression Prevention and Support Program to serve mothers in the Pioneer Valley. We have founded a regional task force called the Postpartum Stress Task Force whose mission it is to create a coordinated plan of service for mothers experiencing postpartum depression and anxiety in the Pioneer Valley- we will be working with DPH's state advisory board on maternal and infant mental health on this. We run the ONLY support group for mothers experiencing postpartum depression and anxiety west of Worcester and north of Hartford. If you can imagine- one support group for the 800-2000 mothers just in the Pioneer Valley who are right now suffering with postpartum depression and anxiety. Women who live far away with infants and no transportation can't even GET to this group.

We are working hard, but our work is not enough. We have very little funding, which is crippling our ability to do what really needs to be done. We need mandatory screening for postpartum depression and anxiety by care providers with insurance reimbursement. We need more community support groups; we need a public education campaign to reduce the stigma attached to postpartum depression and anxiety. Every medical and social service provider in the Pioneer Valley should be trained in how to screen for support and refer mothers and families experiencing postpartum depression and anxiety. In short, we need an infusion of state money into Western Massachusetts directed at tackling this serious public health, feminist and social and economic justice issue confronting mothers in the Pioneer Valley and beyond.  
Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

**Marianne Winters**

Everywoman's Center

Testimony by Marianne Winters, Director

413-545-5821

[mwinters@stuaf.umass.edu](mailto:mwinters@stuaf.umass.edu)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to this Commission on the issues faced by women from the viewpoint of Everywoman's Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

EWC is a university-based Women's Center providing essential counseling and resource services, with programs on violence prevention and direct services aimed at Hampshire County. Our mission is to provide leadership in promoting educational access and equity, to empower women to take full control of their lives, and to strengthen the bonds among all women. We work to stop the cycles of oppression, particularly those based on gender, class, ethnicity, race, mental and physical ability, sexual orientation, and spiritual belief.

EWC provides a variety of resources, counseling, support groups, and prevention and intervention programs designed to address issues of sexual assault and domestic violence. Our services can be found on campus in dorms, classrooms, and individual

sessions, and in Hampshire County, in high schools, community groups, professional groups, and other settings.

I'd like to focus my testimony today on the ways that EWC is promoting empowerment and access for women and propose some recommendations for you to consider in the areas of policy, funding, and legislation.

Founded in 1973, the primary goals of EWC were to advocate for increased numbers of women to have access to public higher education as well as to improve the conditions and lives of women as they transition first into the university and then into their chosen professions.

Now in 2007, our mission is consistent, yet our goals and strategies have changed with in response to trends, resources, and the needs of new generations of students and community members.

Today women comprise approximately half of the student population at UMass, which on the surface could convince someone that educational equity has been achieved. The reality, however, is that women and minority students frequently report feelings of disconnection and even harassment within educational settings. We need programs that bring these issues to light and that support and advocate for students so that they will have the mentoring and support they need to accomplish their goals. Also, while the role and commitment of public higher education is to assure access to the education that students need to participate fully economically in society, too often, this promise gets broken due to the fact that most admissions processes do not take into account the needs of poor and working class students, first generation students, students who come from immigrant communities or communities of color, and students with a history of trauma, either abuse or neglect.

We recommend that the MCSW promote policies and programs that are culturally relevant to young people and non-traditional aged students which deal with the financial, educational, emotional, and family needs they will need to face when attending college.

We now understand that the Gender Pay Gap is becoming narrowed, although less quickly that we would like because women still lose, on the average about \$750,000-\$2m over a lifetime due to their gender. Also, issues such as the need for part-time or a break in work due to family needs, the fact that most women still do the lion's share of the housework and childcare, changed in family structure due to death or divorce, structure in gaps in employment that result in less income available at retirement, more debt and fewer options available at times of crisis or loss.

We recommend continued advocacy and training so that companies and institution that contribute to the gender pay gap through unfair salary practices, unworkable family policies, and unrealistic workplaces be held accountable when they are discriminating in these ways.

This Friday, the UMass Council on the Status of Women is hosting a forum on Building a Family Friendly Workplace at UMass. This is an opportunity for employees of UMass to voice their concerns and needs in the areas of child care, family leave policy, class issues in the workplace, issues faced by working parents and children of aging parents so that they might be incorporated into workable policies for the workplace.

We recommend that MCSW promote family-friendly policies in legislative initiative, educational opportunities, and promote an integrated view of the needs of women in the workforce.

The economic realities faced by women have begun to be addressed with programs and educational efforts aimed at building women's economic self-sufficiency and savvy about financial matters. Programs aimed at supporting non-traditional aged students attending college, building savings through Individual Development Accounts, support for first-time home buyers and women as business owners have begun to be made available. However, we at the EWC understand that women need a baseline of safety for themselves and their children in order to address any of their economic needs. A series of public hearings in Massachusetts sponsored by the Economic Stability Task Force of the Governor's Commission on Sexual and Domestic Violence asked battered women whether or not domestic violence had impacted their economic stability.<sup>1</sup>

Of those domestic violence survivors who testified:

60% said that they had lost a job as a direct or indirect result of domestic violence

96% of employed battered women reported some type of problem in the workplace due to domestic violence.

Many told stories of spouses who bounced checks, accumulated debt, left them with ruined credit and the responsibility to repay debts. Others talked about batterers avoiding paying child support by working under the table, threats to kidnap their kids if they attempted to enforce child support orders, and other means of financial battering.

Statistics of other studies confirm the influence of violence on the economy. 94% of corporate security and safety directors rate domestic violence as a "high" security problem.

Programs that build economic knowledge and self-sufficiency need to account for the safety needs of victims of domestic violence and the effects of financial battering when it has been part of the picture. Job training programs, career counseling, financial management programs that aim to change the financial picture for women need to be trained an account for the needs of women who are victims of sexual assault. Also, workplaces need to develop their effectiveness in assuring safety and job security for victims of domestic violence.

---

<sup>1</sup> Voices of Survival: The Economic Impacts Of Domestic Violence: A Blueprint for Action is available at the website of Jane Doe Inc., The Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence. [www.janedoe.org](http://www.janedoe.org)

We recommend that a large scale training program be implemented for organizations that support economic development on the effects of domestic violence on financial stability. Additionally, that the Commission promote the development and implementation of workplace policies related to domestic violence that assure that victims of violence do not get penalized for time off for legal, medical, or emotional needs, and get their safety needs identified and supported.

Finally, violence is a large scale issue within Massachusetts. At EWC we hear from 300 individuals each year who have been impacted by sexual assault or domestic violence. Acts of community violence such as the December 15 riot at a UMass campus, as well, as individual assaults have impact in the community as a whole, resulting in community that feels unstable and dangerous to all. Tragically, even our campuses are not immune to similar attacks as just occurred last week at Virginia Tech.

EWC has embarked on a holistic prevention approach that educates individuals, students, faculty, community members, and administrators as bystanders. This means that violence is presented as a community issue and with specific actions that community members can take that could decrease the incidence of violence. This approach holds promise in interrupting the cycles of interpersonal violence and community violence while holding the perpetrators accountable. Since the massacre at Virginia Tech, much of the focus in safety has emphasized gun violence, physical safety measures such as metal detectors and communications systems. While these may be necessary steps to take, a comprehensive violence prevention strategy is needed that admits that centers the discussion on issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, and class, which are embedded in these acts of community violence, and that promotes more cohesive ways to live as a community.

We recommend that a widespread prevention campaign be implemented within the University of Massachusetts system that promotes community accountability through a bystander approach to prevention.

These are just a few of the issues that we are working on at EWC. In addition to these, we are concerned with several upcoming bills in the Senate.

Senate Bill 1002 would establish a Harassment Protection Order making victims of sexual assault and stalking eligible for a restraining order similar to domestic violence victims.

Senate Bill 755 would prohibit discrimination in housing against victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

We recommend that MCSW actively support these bills for passage.

Finally, rape crisis centers and domestic violence, two of the most crucial service programs in Massachusetts are consistently woefully under-funded and unable to fulfill the basic needs of our communities.



We recommend that MCSW actively promote the budget recommendations of Jane Doe Inc., the Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence which would help make these programs better able to respond to the needs of their communities.

Once again, I thank you for this opportunity and invite you to contact me if you have additional questions regarding these recommendations. Thank you for bringing this hearing in western Massachusetts and for listening to the public recommendations as you go about your important work on behalf of women in the Commonwealth.